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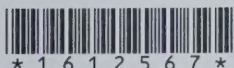
17–22 July 2016

High-level event: Implementation of the sustainable development goals: Opportunities and challenges


Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. Discussions clearly identified the need for implementation through partnership by all actors, including Governments, international organizations, the private sector, civil society organizations and youth, at all levels – national, regional, subregional and local. One panellist emphasized the need to take into account the interconnectedness of the world as key to achieving the ambitious Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.
2. Government and private sector representatives shared their experiences in implementing this challenging and ambitious agenda of indivisible, global and universal goals. They agreed that one size did not fit all and that goals, indicators and resource mobilization strategies had to be contextualized and prioritized.
3. Many delegates provided examples of implementation. Argentina's Council, headed by a social development minister and inclusive of all ministers, had developed a transversal plan to alleviate poverty, the objective chosen by the President of Argentina as representative of the Sustainable Development Goals. In Cambodia, the Minister for Planning had the authority to develop a Sustainable Development Goals strategy with the engagement of all stakeholders. Japan was establishing a Sustainable Development Goals promotion headquarters within the Cabinet, headed by the Prime Minister, that would develop guiding principles, a vision, priority areas, an integrated policy mix for maximum impacts under several Goals and a follow-up mechanism with enhanced engagement by all stakeholders. Thailand had launched the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Russian Federation was working to support better-life technologies both at home and in the least developed countries as part of its Sustainable Development Goals implementation efforts. In Kenya, Safaricom had adopted nine goals and developed key performance indicators to measure and report on progress. Panellists were unanimous in their view that no one could achieve these ambitious objectives alone. Partnerships, the sharing of good practices and capacity-building were needed.

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4. Capacity-building in integrated policy, including through Aid for Trade, would be key in helping developing countries implement such strategies. Integrated policies on gender equality, the provision of education for all, trade cost reduction, skills training, decent job creation, economic diversification, innovation and sustainable tourism, among others, were also needed. As a major donor, Japan had identified quality infrastructure, global health, gender, disaster risk reduction and education as the focus areas for capacity-building and investment.

5. The demands were so many that not even multinational organizations had the human and financial resources to achieve them. Therefore, partnerships at all levels, including governments and private sector levels, were being developed to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals. The role of the private sector, especially public-private partnerships that were transparent, based on equal relations among partners and relied on strong institutions and the rule of law, was also highlighted. Public-private partnerships were needed in infrastructure development, but also in laboratory and standards development.

6. There was also consensus that the “invisible hand” could not be relied on; policy interventions would be needed. In addition, changes were needed in working methods and mindsets. Private leaders, shareholders, governing boards and pension funds needed to ask, “what can the Sustainable Development Goals do for us?” With the right policies, moving to a circular economy that operated from cradle to cradle and addressed food waste and corruption, as well as gender equality, represented trillions in business opportunities. To turn challenges into opportunities, business incentives needed to be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals in order for a new way of conducting business to emerge, respectful of international conventions, labour rights and safety.

7. Plans, policies and institutions needed to be designed to align market signals, investments, trade and South-South cooperation with the Sustainable Development Goals so as to complement official development assistance. This role would go beyond corporate social responsibility. Businesses were profit-driven and responded to market incentives. Therefore, prices needed to reflect the true social and environmental costs. To regain citizen trust in public and private leaders, and thus avoid social unrest, it was also important to develop policies that prevented business tax evasion, exploited labour down the supply chain and ensured that workers received living wages and social safety nets.

8. Policies were also needed to address the mismatch between skills required by the private sector and existing skill sets. Another major challenge was addressing the tension between long-term and short-term perspectives of both Governments and private sector decision makers. Technology provided the means for people to help themselves and development programmes were needed to support technology access in developing countries, as well as capacity-building in developing supportive policies. The role of science, technology and innovation as a cross-cutting means of implementation was also key.

9. Panellists agreed that all voices should be heard in the decision-making process. It was important to raise awareness of the need for every citizen to have ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals and to obtain broader support from the public. The UNCTAD Youth Forum was a welcome step in that direction, as youth formed 50 per cent of the population and would be held accountable for the results in 15 years. Agents of change required the space for innovation and access to resources in order to find innovative solutions and build trust.

10. Panellists noted that the United Nations system needed to reconsider its organization in order to take on an advisory and enabling role instead of a project implementation role. This could be done through existing coordination mechanisms, such as the Chief Executives Board Inter-agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity – bringing

together 15 United Nations agencies to support Member States in implementing Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 9 – and the eTrade for All initiative launched at UNCTAD XIV, which would bring together the 15 United Nations agencies and 22 business and industry groups to support the Goals. In addition, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development was developing tools for its members to measure their time frame for achieving the targets and for other countries to define strategies to implement the Goals, as well as support the data revolution.

11. Solidarity was needed to share experiences and learn from one another. Countries stood to benefit from, for example, the graduating experience of Bangladesh and the experience of the Ibero-American Conference with regard to good practices among countries to alleviate poverty and, thereby, inequalities. In partnership, and through the mutual sharing of policy experiences, countries could receive support as they strove for structural reform to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

12. Participants requested that UNCTAD:

- (a) Help embed international conventions into trade agreements;
 - (b) Ensure that trade blocks did not impede market access by non-member countries;
 - (c) Mobilize resources to support targets 17.10, 17.11 and 17.12 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially in the least developed countries;
 - (d) Cooperate with other organizations in providing capacity-building in trade, investment and development, to unlock constraints and permit the private sector to prosper.
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